



# House of Representatives

General Assembly

**File No. 771**

*January Session, 2007*

Substitute House Bill No. 5799

*House of Representatives, May 7, 2007*

The Committee on Appropriations reported through REP. MERRILL of the 54th Dist., Chairperson of the Committee on the part of the House, that the substitute bill ought to pass.

***AN ACT REQUIRING A SERVICE OFFICER WITH PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS.***

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. Section 27-102l of the general statutes is repealed and the  
2 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2007*):

3 (a) There shall be a Department of Veterans' Affairs. The Veterans'  
4 Home shall be within the department and shall be located in Rocky  
5 Hill. The department head shall be the Commissioner of Veterans'  
6 Affairs, who shall be appointed by the Governor in accordance with  
7 the provisions of sections 4-5 to 4-8, inclusive, with the powers and  
8 duties prescribed therein.

9 (b) The commissioner may appoint a unit head to administer a  
10 veterans' advocacy and assistance unit for the aid and benefit of  
11 veterans, their spouses and eligible dependents and family members.  
12 The unit shall have a staff of not less than eight men and women,  
13 including six service officers, and clerical personnel. The unit head and  
14 the service officers shall be veterans, as defined in section 27-103, or

15 veterans who were awarded the armed forces expeditionary medal for  
16 service by the armed forces. At least one of the service officers shall be  
17 a woman having a demonstrated interest in the concerns of women  
18 veterans, who shall be responsible for addressing those concerns, and,  
19 effective upon the next opening of a service officer position occurring  
20 on or after July 1, 2007, at least one of the service officers shall be an  
21 individual having bilingual proficiency in English and Spanish, within  
22 existing authorized positions. Each service officer shall successfully  
23 complete a course in veterans' benefits within one year of  
24 commencement of employment and shall be assigned to one of the five  
25 congressional districts of the state.

26 (c) In addition to the powers and duties prescribed under section 4-  
27 8, the commissioner shall have the following powers and duties:

28 (1) To prepare studies and collect information concerning facilities  
29 and services available to members of the armed forces, veterans, their  
30 spouses or eligible dependents, including facilities and services for  
31 veterans who may have been exposed to a Vietnam herbicide during  
32 their periods of military service;

33 (2) To conduct interviews in the nursing homes or hospitals  
34 throughout the state to determine the number of veterans admitted  
35 and ascertaining which benefits such veterans are currently receiving  
36 and are entitled to receive;

37 (3) To cooperate with service agencies and organizations  
38 throughout the state in disseminating and furnishing counsel and  
39 assistance of benefit to residents of this state who are or have been  
40 members of the armed forces, their spouses or eligible dependents,  
41 which will indicate the availability of: (A) Educational training and  
42 retraining facilities; (B) health, medical, rehabilitation and housing  
43 services and facilities; (C) employment and reemployment services; (D)  
44 provisions of federal, state and local laws affording financial rights,  
45 privileges and benefits; and (E) other matters of similar nature;

46 (4) To assist veterans, their spouses and eligible dependents and

47 family members in the preparation, presentation, proof and  
48 establishment of such claims, privileges, rights and other benefits  
49 accruing to them under federal, state and local laws;

50 (5) To cooperate with all national, state and local governmental and  
51 private agencies securing or offering services or any benefits to  
52 veterans, their spouses or dependents;

53 (6) To develop and prepare a long-range plan and mission statement  
54 for the Veterans' Home and the veterans' advocacy and assistance unit;  
55 and

56 (7) To review all appeals made by veterans, their spouses or eligible  
57 dependents or family members and render the final decision thereon  
58 regarding the denial of admission to any program or the refusal to  
59 render any service or benefit which is administered by the Department  
60 of Veterans' Affairs, the discharge or transfer from any such program  
61 or any disciplinary action taken while participating in any such  
62 program.

63 (d) The commissioner shall adopt, in accordance with the provisions  
64 of chapter 54, and enforce, such regulations and procedures for the  
65 operation, administration and management of the department and all  
66 programs and services under the jurisdiction of the department,  
67 including, but not limited to, procedures relating to admission and  
68 discharge or transfer of veterans in the Veterans' Home, a per diem fee  
69 schedule for programs, services and benefits provided by the Veterans'  
70 Home, and the participation of eligible family members in programs or  
71 services provided by the home.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
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Section 1	July 1, 2007	27-102l
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**APP**      *Joint Favorable Subst.*

The following fiscal impact statement and bill analysis are prepared for the benefit of members of the General Assembly, solely for the purpose of information, summarization, and explanation, and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose:

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**OFA Fiscal Note****State Impact:**

Agency Affected	Fund-Effect	FY 08 \$	FY 09 \$
Department of Veterans' Affairs	GF - None	None	None

Note: GF=General Fund

**Municipal Impact:** None

**Explanation**

The bill requires that at least one of the Veteran Service Officers (VSO's) within the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) must be proficient in both English and Spanish. This provision is effective upon the next VSO position opening on or after 7/1/07 and within the existing authorized positions. This provision does not require establishing a new position, therefore filling a funded vacancy is not anticipated to result in additional costs to DVA.

sHB 7077 (the Appropriations Act) as favorably reported by the Appropriations Committee, includes funding in FY 08 and FY 09 for a new VSO position (\$58,924 annul salary and additional fringe benefits). The budget does not specifically establish the new VSO position for the purpose identified in the bill.

As a result of the bill's provisions, the next opening of a VSO position would be required to meet the bilingual proficiency standard.

The department currently has 9 VSO's throughout the five districts with no existing vacancies.

**The Out Years**

The annualized ongoing fiscal impact identified above would

continue into the future subject to inflation.

**OLR Bill Analysis****sHB 5799*****AN ACT REQUIRING A SERVICE OFFICER WITH PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS.*****SUMMARY:**

This bill requires that at least one of the six service officers (VSOs) that the veterans' affairs commissioner must appoint to the Veterans' Advocacy and Assistance Unit be proficient in both English and Spanish. The requirement takes effect when a vacancy occurs on or after July 1, 2007.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2007

**BACKGROUND*****Advocacy and Assistance Unit and Service Officers***

The unit is responsible for helping veterans, their eligible spouses, and eligible dependents obtain veterans' benefits. Among other things, according to the Veterans' Affairs Department, VSOs:

1. collect and prepare service and benefit data for veterans, their spouses, and eligible dependents;
2. canvass nursing homes to determine if veterans or their spouses are receiving benefits for which they are eligible;
3. help establish, prepare, and present veterans' claims;
4. help disseminate information to veterans;
5. counsel veterans about educational, training, health, medical, rehabilitation, housing, and employment services; and
6. represent veterans with federal claims before the U.S.

Department of Veterans' Affairs.

By law, one VSO must be a woman interested in the concerns of female veterans and responsible for addressing them.

***Legislative History***

The House referred the bill (File 61) to the Government Administration and Elections Committee, which reported the bill favorably without any changes. The House then referred the bill to the Appropriations Committee, which reported this substitute favorably. The original bill required at least one of the six VSOs to have a demonstrated interest in the concerns of Latino and Hispanic veterans and be responsible for addressing them.

**COMMITTEE ACTION**

Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Joint Favorable Change of Reference  
Yea 7 Nay 1 (03/01/2007)

Public Safety and Security Committee

Joint Favorable  
Yea 16 Nay 7 (03/06/2007)

Government Administration and Elections Committee

Joint Favorable  
Yea 9 Nay 4 (03/28/2007)

Appropriations Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute  
Yea 49 Nay 0 (04/17/2007)